2: O'Shea G-3 (1944-1945) 1947 MK4 Trucial Oman MK4

442 so as to form a nest. Some pearl dealers keep as many as forty-five
[804] sets, graduated according to their perforations. The weighing of pearls is a most complicated matter, but very simply a pearl is rated in *chaus*, a Bombay measure, which is one three hundred and thirtieth part of a *maskal*, which is made up in turn by 100 *dokras*. A *chau* is really a unit of value as well as a weight, and changes according to the number of pearls being valued together. Thus, two pearls, weighing exactly half a third of a pearl, would not be estimated so highly in *chaus* as the single pearl. The finest pearl I saw in Jam Shan's collection was valued at £8,000, or nearly £75 a *chau*.

228 If the valuation of pearls is a complicated affair the financial
469 organization of the industry is even more so. The industry teems with merchants, brokers, middlemen, agents, and moneylenders. First the pearl fleet has to be financed before it can go to sea, and money has to be provided for the crews and divers. This is
[452] advanced partly by the owners of the boats and partly by a special class of moneylenders called *Musaqqams*, who demand ten or twenty-five per cent interest. Every boat is commanded by a captain, or *Nakhuda*, who receives a percentage of the catch; sometimes he is the owner of the boat. Next in importance to him is the *Ghasah*, or diver, followed by the *Siyub*, or hauler, the *Radhif*, or extra hand, and the *Walaid*, or apprentice, whose duty it is to catch fish, cook, look after the pipes and coffee, and attend to other minor duties.

The *ghasah*, whose only work is to dive, are mostly poor Arabs and free negroes or slaves, and their efficiency depends more on their skill and daring than on the strength of their constitution. A
[567] slave diver who is not afraid to enter deep and muddy water containing weeds is ordinarily valued at considerably over a thousand rupees. The *siyub*, whose duties are merely to manage the boat and to lower and pull up the divers, are usually landsmen whom age or other causes have obliged to abandon diving. The total crew of a pearl boat varies from ten to forty men, the average
[501] number being sixteen. All sorts of boats are used for pearling, even jollyboats being fitted out for the purpose, but the majority are sambuks, batils, bagarahs and shuais. A large boat, holding forty men, will cost 30,000 rupees or more to construct and fit out.

228 There are two principal seasons for pearl diving: the *Ghaus-al-Bard*, or cold-diving season, which lasts from April to May, and the *Ghaus-al-Kabir*, or 'great diving', beginning in June after the end

2: O'Shea G-3 (1944-1945) 1947 MK4 Trucial Oman MK4

of sharks made their appearance off the banks and attacked nearly thirty divers, two of whom were killed under water, the others being rescued in a precarious condition.

Diving is carried out every day during fine weather, work commencing an hour after sunrise and ceasing an hour before sunset. The interval between the early morning prayer and the start of diving is spent by the crews in opening the oysters collected on the previous day. This is done with crooked knives called *mufaliq*, under the superintendence of the *Nakhuda*, who weighs and registers the pearls. The stench arising from this operation must be smelt to be believed. Before they start work the divers are allowed a light meal of half a pound of dates and a few cups of coffee each. Once they have entered the water work is continued without intermission until *Dhuhr*, about 2 p.m., when it is suspended for prayers, a few cups of coffee, and an hour's rest. After *Maghrib*, or evening prayers, the divers take a substantial meal of fish, rice and dates and then, after a little smoking and coffee-drinking, retire to rest for the night.

Divers sometimes suffer from the stings of the devil-fish, and when there are many of these about they wear a long white shirt to protect them from their embraces. Although a very fatiguing occupation, diving is not particularly injurious to the health, and is practised even by old men. In some cases it gives rise to diseases of the respiratory system and to deafness. Skin disease is a common ailment amongst divers, who guard against it by rubbing themselves with *jafi*, a concoction made from the inner shell of the Persian acorn. Senna leaves and other herbs are taken in cases of sickness, but if serious illness occurs, recourse is had to cautery with a hot iron.

Pearl diving is nearly always an hereditary occupation. The reason for this is purely economic. During the off-season the divers have to provide for their families and are often too lazy to undertake any other kind of work, although a few take up fishing. Being an extravagant class, they soon spend the money they have made from diving, and are obliged to borrow from the *Nakhuda*. They are seldom able to repay this debt, the interest on which accumulates, and the only way in which it can be repaid is by means of annual instalments deducted from their diving pay and bonuses. Thus a family of divers, to the second or third generation, may be indebted to a *Nakhuda* or his heirs and, unless the diver finds an alternative means of repaying the debt, he must continue diving to the end of his days, and his son after him.

2: O'Shea G-3 (1944-1945) 1947 MK4 Trucial Oman MK4

The *Nakhuda* himself is very seldom free from debt, for the expenses of fitting out and provisioning the boats and of retaining the services of capable divers and making them advances, often as much as 3,000 rupees per season, make him equally dependent on the *Musaqqams*, or moneylenders. Should a *Nakhuda* be unable to pay off his debts, the *Salifat-al-Ghaus*, or 'Diving Court', a tribunal set up by the sheikh of the district, may order his boats to be sold and his divers to be handed over to the creditor, although his house and other personal property is exempt from seizure. Usually, however, the court fixes an annual instalment for the discharge of the debt, and the *Nakhuda* is then free to form relations with another *Musaqqam*, if he can find one willing to finance him in these circumstances. These rules, although drastic, are very necessary to protect the pearling industry from financial loss.

The diving court has other functions, one of which is to enforce the 'laws' of the industry as regards the engagement of labour, rates of interest, supervision of taxes due to the sheikhs, and the maintenance of a standard of quality of the pearls sold in the open market. Dealers who charge excess prices for pearls, or who pass bad or spurious pearls for those of first quality, are severely reprimanded or even suspended from trading, whilst the man who dares to bring a false or 'cultured' pearl into the Gulf is liable to be outlawed by the sheikh.

It is interesting to watch the brokers haggling over a heap of gleaming pearls in the market. It would take the average European several minutes to work out a price, but the Arab merchant, even when otherwise illiterate, is usually a clever mathematician and benefits by the fluctuations of market rates and by the discrepancies of the weighing appliances in use in the Gulf. Some experts, generally sea-going *Tawwashes*, or dealers, profess a power to distinguish roughly the depth of water and even the particular neighbourhood from which a pearl shown to them may have been obtained; thus they assert that pearls from the banks near Bahrain are marked by greater lustre, and those from banks further northward by greater 'solidity'. They all possess an uncanny ability to sum a pearl up at a glance, and the success of the individual trader depends chiefly upon his power to appraise the relative fineness of pearls belonging to the same class, and he has no set rules to assist his judgment.

The largest pearls are sent to India to be sold individually by the *chau*; but, in the assortment of the remainder into packets—